

Fact Sheet

Senate Democrats are Working Together for a Better Future

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Democrats continue to advance a common-sense agenda that reflects what is most important to Hispanic Americans and their families: access to a college education; economic and retirement security; affordable health care; a strong national defense; and energy independence. The policy initiatives that Democrats will continue to advocate in 2005 will benefit millions of Hispanic Americans and provide new opportunities to make America even stronger for future generations.

MAKING COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE

Democrats continue their fight to make higher education more affordable and accessible to all students in the United States and have consistently fought to increase the minimum Pell grants and expand the program so that more students receive this critical grant support.

While the enrollment of minority populations in post-secondary continues to grow, participation rates for Hispanic Americans still trail behind whites and Asians. Among high school graduates age 15 to 24, 34 percent of Hispanic Americans were enrolled in post-secondary institutions, compared to 41 percent of whites and 51 percent of Asians. (Congressional Research Service, February 9, 2005)

Instead of working to reduce this gap, the Bush Administration has proposed eliminating two TRIO programs and the GEAR UP program, which provide

services to help disadvantaged students complete high school and enter and succeed in college. In addition, the Bush Administration's policies will force nearly 1.3 million students to see a cut in their Pell Grants by a total of about \$300 million and 90,000 students may completely lose their eligibility for these grants. (*Boston Globe*, June 12, 2005)

STRENGTHENING OUR ECONOMY AND IMPROVING ECONOMIC EQUALITY

ENSURING CRITICAL CAPITAL TO START-UP BUSINESSES. Democrats know the important role small businesses play in the U.S. economy. We are fighting to expand the ability of small businesses to access the capital and resources they need to succeed. While Hispanics represent the second-fastest growing segment of small business owners in the United States, the four-year survival rate is lower for minority-owned enterprises than for non-minority-owned enterprises.

Democrats understand the challenges small business owners face. That is why Senator **Kerry** the ranking Democratic member on the Small Business and Entrepreneurial Committee recently introduced an amendment to provide low-interest credit loans to small business owners, including farmers (**S. Admt. 825**). Rather than encouraging growth in the small business sector, President Bush and Congressional Republicans in Congress have cut funding to the Small Business Ad-

ministration (SBA) by \$85 million and have proposed changes to Social Security that would burden small business owners with increased costs and regulatory requirements in order to administer private accounts. (Small Business Administration (SBA), "Self-Employed Business Ownership Rules in the United States: 1979–2003," December 2004; SBA, "Dynamics of Minority-Owned Employer Establishments, 1997–2001," February 2005)

INCREASING HISPANIC HOMEOWNERSHIP. Democrats know that owning your own home means long-term financial stability. Democrats have encouraged the Republican leadership in both the House and the Senate to strengthen homeownership programs, fair lending laws, and fair housing laws as stated in legislation.

It is essential that more is learned about the status of Hispanic homeownership and that communities are encouraged to improve their efforts to strengthen homeownership opportunities. Yet challenges to home purchasing persist for Hispanic Americans:

- Hispanics have a lower-rate of homeownership than their white counterparts;
- Forty-seven percent of Hispanic Americans are homeowners compared with 76 percent of white Americans;
- Hispanics who apply for a home mortgage also have a lower approval rate than whites; and

Seventy-one percent of Hispanic applicants in 2003 were approved for mortgages as compared with 80 percent of white applicants. (Esparanza USA, "State of Hispanic Housing in the United States," June 2005)

PROVIDING FAMILIES WITH AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

Democrats are working hard to close the health care divide in the United States. In April, Senate and House Democrats, working with along with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Congressional Native American Caucus, unveiled a set of principles for addressing racial and ethnic health dis-

parities entitled, *Closing the Health Care Divide*.

The Democrats' *Closing the Health Care Divide* principles include:

- Expanding the health care safety net;
- Diversifying the health care workforce;
- Combating diseases that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities;
- Emphasizing prevention and behavioral health;
- Promoting the collection and dissemination of data and enhancing medical research; and
- Providing interpreters and translation services in the delivery of health care.

Democrats are committed to moving forward with strategies to address health disparities. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both Hispanic men and women in the United States today. Overall, Hispanics are nearly two times as likely to have Type 2 diabetes as whites of similar age. (CDC, "Eliminate Disparities in Cardiovascular Disease," July 1, 2005; CDC, "Eliminate Health Disparities Diabetes Fact Sheet," July 1, 2005) Hispanic Americans are also less likely to receive cancer screenings than whites and account for a disproportionately large share of new AIDS cases. (Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2005) Democrats are working to reduce these disparities through legislation and adequate funding for existing programs.

Hispanic Americans are hit especially hard by the lack of affordable health insurance: one in three Hispanics are uninsured. Since President Bush took office in 2001, the nation's uninsured problem has grown much worse. The President has failed to provide a meaningful response, and his proposals could actually make some people worse off. He and Republicans in Congress are seeking substantial cuts to Medicaid. Democrats are fighting these proposed Medicaid cuts and are seeking ways to expand health coverage, including supporting the *Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act* (S. 1104 and H.R. 1233).

Unfortunately, President Bush has chosen to further restrict access to health care, by promoting programs

such as health savings accounts that would discourage employers from offering health insurance to employees and by reducing Medicaid funding over the next 10 years by \$60 billion in his Fiscal Year 2006 budget. Since 2001, the number of Americans covered by employer-provided health insurance plans has decreased from 65 percent to 61 percent. Meanwhile, the drastic Medicaid cut in the President's Fiscal Year 2006 budget could prevent some of the nation's most vulnerable people from accessing health care services. (Kaiser Family Foundation, "Employer Health Benefits 2004 Annual Survey," September 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2003," 2004)

ENSURING A SECURE RETIREMENT

Democrats stand united to protect Social Security. We are committed to strengthening Social Security and ensuring that the program will be there for our children and grandchildren. Democrats believe that any changes in the program should be done right by first doing no harm, encouraging greater savings, and paying Social Security back what it's owed.

The President's plan to "fix" Social Security includes diverting Social Security funds into private accounts, which would do nothing to strengthen the program. Instead, privatizing Social Security will dismantle one of the most successful public programs in the history of the United States, cut benefits for all Americans, and increase the national debt.

Without Social Security:

- ♦ Fifty-six percent of Hispanic seniors would live in poverty;
- ♦ Hispanics have lower earnings and benefit from Social Security's "progressive" benefits;
- ♦ Hispanics live longer and receive greater benefits during longer retirements;
- ♦ Hispanics have a higher disability rate and rely on disability benefits more often; and
- ♦ Hispanics are less likely to have additional sources of retirement income.

STRENGTHENING OUR NATIONAL DEFENSE

Democrats are working hard to provide our troops with the resources they need while serving in combat, by advocating for sufficient equipment such as up-armored High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (Humvees) and body armor, as well as providing troops with key benefits — such as access to health care, pay protection, and improved survivor benefits — to ensure readiness and support recruiting and retention efforts.

Hispanic Americans have a proud history of service in the United States military. Currently, over 10 percent of the active duty United States Armed Forces personnel are of Hispanic descent; well over 1.1 million are veterans. These Hispanic Americans are serving bravely all over the world, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 200 Hispanic military personnel have made the ultimate sacrifice in our nation's defense in Operation Iraqi Freedom. (U.S. Census Bureau, April 2003; Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, July 5, 2005)

Among those in the military, Hispanic Americans disproportionately serve in the most dangerous occupations, but are also the least likely among the American population to have health insurance. The President's budget shifts the burden of health care costs onto veterans by providing inadequate funding for VA health care increasing annual fees, co-payments and slashing funding for VA nursing homes and medical and prosthetic research. Every Senate Republican — with the exception of Senator Specter — voted to oppose legislation (**S.Amdt. 344**, H.R. 1268) introduced by Senator Murray that would have provided nearly \$2 billion to address serious shortages in veterans' services. (Pew Hispanic Center, March 2003; National Coalition on Health Care, 2004)

MAKING AMERICA ENERGY INDEPENDENT

Hispanic families — like all American families — are under increasing financial stress due to rising energy prices. America currently imports 58 percent of its oil, 5 percent more than when Bush took office. (Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, "Overview of US Petroleum Trade," May 2005) Democrats are working to reduce America's dependence on foreign

energy sources and create jobs by increasing the supply of domestically produced clean, renewable energy and by increasing energy efficiency.

Senate Democrats successfully passed proposals opposed by the Republican leadership to move America toward energy independence. For example, Senator **Bingaman** introduced the Renewable Portfolio Standard, which would require utilities to produce 10 percent of their electricity from alternative resources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass by 2020.

While President Bush has touted his own energy plan, whenever he admits will not lower high gasoline prices, Democrats have called on the President to pressure the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to increase production and to defer deliveries to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The Administration has refused to take action, even though these initiatives would help stabilize rising gas prices.